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Imagery analysis report

Soviet and Cuban Naval/Maritime Activity at Luanda, Angola (S)

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SOVIET AND CUBAN NAVAL/MARITIME ACTIVITY AT LUANDA, ANGOLA (S)

1. (S/D) Since early 1977, the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, Cuba have used naval, port, air, and other land-based facilities at Luanda, Angola, to support a variety of naval and maritime activities. This imagery-derived report will discuss Soviet naval use of Luanda Naval Base Ilha De Luanda [redacted]. [redacted] Luanda Airfield [redacted] and other related installations (Figure 1). In addition to the naval activity, this report will also discuss related maritime developments, including the use of Luanda Port Facilities [redacted] for the delivery of military equipment to the Angolan Government and the use of Luanda harbor to support Soviet and Cuban fishing activity in the South Atlantic.

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2. (S/D) Luanda, along with Conakry, Guinea, provides most of the onshore support for Soviet naval ships operating off the west coast of Africa. Berthing for Soviet naval vessels, both combatants and auxiliaries (Figure 2), is provided at the small formerly Portuguese naval base on the peninsula called Luanda Island, approximately 2 nautical miles (nm) west of the commercial port facilities. In addition to the observation of Soviet ships, two further photographic signatures showed a Soviet naval presence at this installation. Crew formation markers and a physical training area like those seen at naval bases throughout the Soviet Union were both discernible in the support area.

3. (S/D) While the physical separation of the Luanda Naval Base from the commercial port allows for both increased security and a lower visibility for the Soviets, there are berthing restrictions at the naval base. Because of the limited space, Soviet ships were always observed Mediterranean-moored and must share berthing space with the Angolan Navy.

4. (S/D) A second restriction is the limited repair capability. Repair facilities consist of two end-haul marine railways that can only accommodate small patrol boats and landing craft. As in Ethiopia and formerly in Somalia, the Soviets have increased the repair capability at Luanda with the addition of a floating drydock. On [redacted] a 4,500-ton floating drydock (AFDL) was observed for the first time in Angolan waters 3 nm north of Luanda Port Facilities. The AFDL was dead-in-the-water and contained a small unidentified vessel (Figure 3). This was probably the same floating drydock that had previously been observed at San Carlos Port Facility (now known as Luba; [redacted] in the West African country of Equatorial Guinea. According to unclassified sources, a fishing depot agreement between the Soviet Union and Equatorial Guinea was scheduled to expire on [redacted]. Imagery of Luba on [redacted] showed that the floating drydock and several fishing trawlers had departed the port. The purpose of the AFDL in Luanda is probably to support the Soviet and Cuban fishing fleet, as was the case in Equatorial Guinea. This floating drydock is smaller than the 8,500-ton-class AFDM that was formerly at Berbera, Somalia, and is currently onstation at Dehalak Island in Ethiopia.

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5. (S/D) The first Soviet naval ship observed at the naval base was an Amur-class repair ship (AR) on imagery of [redacted]. Since that date, at least one Amur has usually been seen, providing a light repair capability for both Soviet ships making port calls and patrol craft of the Angolan Navy. Logistical support, including refueling and replenishment of stores for visiting surface ships and submarines, is routinely conducted by Soviet auxiliary ships such as Boris Chiliken and Dubna-class replenishment oilers. A Malakhov Kurgan-class refrigerated fish transport with one of its cranes extended over an adjacent Alligator landing ship tank (LST) was observed performing such functions on [redacted] (Figure 4). Soviet combatants that have been at the naval base include Kanin, Kotlin, and Kashin destroyers and F-class submarines.

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6. (S/D) In addition to the berthing of Soviet naval ships, the naval base also supports the Angolan Navy which is largely supplied and trained by Soviet and Cuban personnel. The following patrol boats and landing craft have been provided by Moscow: one Zhuk PB, four Shershen PTs, and three Polnocny LSMs (Figure 2). The Soviets have also been assisting in the refurbishing and repair of patrol craft which had been left by the Portuguese. Evidence of such activity was observed on [redacted] when an Argos-class PGM was moored under the stern crane of an Amur AR, apparently undergoing some kind of maintenance or modification in the bridge area.

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Luanda Port Facilities

7. (S/D) Luanda Port Facilities is one of three deep-water ports in Angola and is a primary delivery point for military equipment being furnished to the Angolan Government by the Soviet Union and its allies. Berthing space, cargo handling capabilities, and open storage areas have been expanded during the past three years. Berths for at least five oceangoing freighters and at least six portal cranes have been added to the main quay wall which is extensively used by Cuban, Soviet, and East European merchant ships. This quay appears to be used largely for the offloading of military equipment and general-purpose motor vehicles of all types, while the mole at the port is used for the loading/offloading of other types of general cargo. A small, fence-secured area consisting of four buildings and a volleyball court probably houses a Cuban/Angolan unit that provides security and control over military deliveries at the port (Figure 5).

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8. (S/D) A berthing area 1 nm north of the naval base on the Ilha De Luanda apparently supports the fishing program of both Cuba and the Soviet Union in the South Atlantic. In addition to the regular observation of side, stern, and fish factory trawlers of both nations, larger fishing support vessels including refrigerated fish transport ships were observed at Luanda.

Luanda Airfield

9. (S/D) Other facilities in Luanda, in addition to the naval base, support the Soviet naval presence in the South Atlantic. TU-95 (BEAR D), Soviet long-range reconnaissance aircraft, were first observed in the military support area of Luanda Airfield in February 1977. A routine deployment to Luanda generally consists of two BEAR D supported by two AN-12 (CUB) for a two-to-three-week period (Figure 6). The most recent observation of BEAR at Luanda was in September 1980.

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Communications Sites

10. (S/D) The ongoing Soviet and Cuban military presence in Angola has led to the establishment of land-based communications sites designed to fulfill a command and control function. In May 1979, a PARK DRIVE set, a Soviet mobile satellite ground station, was identified for the first time in Angola (Figure 7). The PARK DRIVE was at a fence-secured headquarters/administration complex, 1 nm southwest of Luanda Airfield. An undetermined number of canvas-covered mobile communications vans/pieces of equipment were also at the installation. Ethiopia is the only other Sub-Saharan country in Africa where a PARK DRIVE set has been identified.

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11. (S/D) A ground scar (probable cable link) extends from this installation southward approximately 1 nm to Luanda Radio Communications (Radcom) Southwest [REDACTED] This facility consists of at least one rhombic antenna (115 degrees), ten communications masts, one control building, and an undetermined number of canvas-covered mobile communications vans/pieces of equipment. The entire site is fence secured, and the control area is separately secured. This high-frequency (HF) radcom facility may either support the Soviet Navy or be a part of a Cuban communications network in Africa.

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